

## Notes on the Ayyūbid Inscriptions at al-Ṣubayba (Qal‘at Nimrūd)

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In 1888 the Swiss scholar Max van Berchem published four inscriptions from al-Ṣubayba as part of a larger study of the castle's architecture and history.<sup>1</sup> Van Berchem himself admitted that his inspection of these inscriptions—three dating from the Ayyūbid period and one from the reign of the Mamlūk Sultan Baybars—was not thorough. His intention was to provide “un texte à peu près complet, où les dates et les noms propres ne font pas l'objet d'un doute.”<sup>2</sup> In spite of the provisional nature of his study, these inscriptions have not yet been subjected to additional epigraphic scrutiny, although al-Ṣubayba has aroused much interest in both scholarly and non-academic circles.<sup>3</sup>

The recent discovery by R. Ellenblum of four previously unknown Ayyūbid inscriptions at al-Ṣubayba provides an opportunity to reexamine the original three Ayyūbid texts published by van Berchem, leading to their further elucidation. All seven inscriptions have been transcribed and translated below in rough chronological order.<sup>4</sup>

I would first like to express my gratitude to Prof. Moshe Sharon, who introduced me to Arabic epigraphy and guided my first steps in this field. I would also like to thank Mr. Asad Da‘būs, of the Israel Parks Authority, who extended much necessary assistance at the site.

<sup>1</sup>“Le Château de Bâniās et ses inscriptions,” *JA* ser. 8, 12 (1888), 440–70 (hereafter “Bâniās”). See *ibid.*, 440–43, for a discussion of earlier reports on these inscriptions. The following abbreviations are used: *MCIA*, I = M. van Berchem, *Matériaux pour un Corpus Inscriptionum Arabicarum. Deuxième partie—Syrie du Sud. I: Jérusalem “Ville”* (Cairo, 1922); *MCIA*, II = *ibid.*, II: *Jérusalem “Haram”* (Cairo, 1927); *RCEA* = *Répertoire chronologique d'épigraphie arabe*, ed. G. Wiet et al. (Cairo, 1931–).

<sup>2</sup>“Bâniās,” 443.

<sup>3</sup>See the review of the historical literature on the castle in R. Ellenblum, “Who Built Qal‘at al-Ṣubayba?” (this volume).

<sup>4</sup>The translations are somewhat literal, so as to preserve the flavor of the original Arabic text. No. VI was not translated, because it is only a small fragment and repeats the texts of Nos. II–V.

Except for some notes, mostly of an epigraphic or technical nature, they are unaccompanied by a commentary, as this has been provided within the framework of R. Ellenblum's article. It must be mentioned that van Berchem's work, in spite of certain mistakes, remains a monument to his erudite scholarship, a trait which becomes even more evident in his later epigraphic works. His pioneering efforts in deciphering the original three inscriptions, and the subsequent analysis of al-Ṣubayba as a whole, are still admirable and facilitate the relatively easy reading of the recently discovered texts.

### I

Found in situ, about halfway up the western side of Tower 1 (see the map in Ellenblum), near the juncture with the adjoining wall, placed above an aperture. Four lines of typical Ayyūbid *naskh*,<sup>5</sup> carved in relief into hard limestone,<sup>6</sup> with diacritical points and some vowels. Height: 0.35 m; length: 1.20 m. Published: “Bâniās,” 463–64; *RCEA*, X, 257 (no. 3984).

<sup>5</sup>For other examples of this style, see the Ayyūbid inscriptions in *MCIA*, I–II.

<sup>6</sup>All seven of these inscriptions are carved in this type of stone, which is readily found on Mt. Hermon and the surrounding hills.

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم أمر بانشا(ء) هذه البنا
٢. شورة المباركة مولانا السلطان الملك العزيز عماد
٣. الدين سيف الاسلام أخ (sic) الملوك شمس السلاطين  
أبو الفتح عثمان بن الملك
٤. العادل<sup>7</sup> ناصر أمير المؤمنين تقرّبا إلى  
الله رداً له سنة خمس وعشرين وستمائة

(1) In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Ordered the construction<sup>8</sup> of this blessed fortification (*bāshūra*)<sup>9</sup>

(2) our lord, the Sultan al-Malik al-ʿAzīz ʿImād

(3) al-Dīn, the sword of Islam, brother of the princes (*mulūk*),<sup>10</sup> the sun of the sultans, Abū ʿl-Faṭḥ<sup>11</sup> ʿUthmān b. al-Malik

(4) al-ʿĀdil, helper of the Commander of the Faithful. [This was done in order] to receive Allāh's favor and to obtain for him His assistance. [This was in] the year 625 (1227–8).

## II

Found in the wall which blocks the door on the southern side of Tower 11.<sup>12</sup> Five lines of especially delicate Ayyūbid *naskh*,<sup>13</sup> carved into hard limestone, with diacritical points and some vowels. Height: 0.90 m (approx.); length: 1.20 m (approx.). Published: "Bāniās," 457–58; *RCEA*, XI, 8–9 (no. 4014).

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم أمر بعمارة هذا<sup>14</sup> الثغر المحروس  
العبد المذنب<sup>15</sup> الخاطي<sup>16</sup>
٢. الفقير إلى رحمة الله عثمان بن مولانا السلطان  
الاعظم الملك العادل العالم
٣. العامل<sup>16a</sup> المجاهد الم رابط الغازي الشهيد أبي بكر بن  
أيوب تغمده الله برحمته كان
٤. ابتداء<sup>17</sup> هذا البرج السعيد<sup>18</sup> في شهر ربيع الأول  
سنة سبع وعشرين وستمائة وتولى عمارته
٥. العبد الفقير أبي (sic) بكر بن نصر الله بن أبي  
سراقة الهمداني العزيزي

<sup>7</sup>Cf. "Bāniās": العالم. The *dāl* is carved above the ʿayn.

<sup>8</sup>See note 19 below.

<sup>9</sup>The Arabic sources seem to use the term *bāshūra* in various meanings: barbican, bastion and bent gate. See U. Ben-Horin, "Bāshūra—Bar Shūra" (in Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 23 (1951–52), 243–44; R. Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 3rd ed. (Leiden-Paris, 1967), II, 89a; EI<sup>2</sup>, I, 831a.

<sup>10</sup>In Ayyūbid parlance, *malik* (pl. *mulūk*) had the meaning of prince and was applied freely to members of the royal family.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. van Berchem's translation (p. 464): "le père de la victoire." This is, of course, al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān's *kunya* and it is preferable to leave it untranslated.

<sup>12</sup>It would seem that this tower was damaged during the Mongol occupation of the fortress in 658/1260. It is possible that the inscriptions no longer found in situ were displaced at that time.

As for this particular inscription, it would seem that it is in its original location, in spite of the repairs initiated by Baybars, when this gate ceased to be the main gate to the fortress. Ellenblum, this volume, p. 111.

<sup>13</sup>That is, at least, when compared to Nos. III–VI.

<sup>14</sup>"Bāniās": هذه, but it seems that *hādhā* is written as it should be.

<sup>15</sup>Van Berchem questioned this reading. The appearance of this word in the other inscriptions confirms it.

<sup>16</sup>"Bāniās": الخاطي, as is found in the inscription.

<sup>16a</sup>Missing in *RCEA*, XI, 8.

(1) In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Ordered the restoration<sup>20</sup> of this defended frontier fortress (*thaghr*), the sinning, erring servant,

(2) needy for Allāh's mercy, 'Uthmān b. our lord, the great Sultan, al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, the scholar,

(3) the doer of good deeds, the holy warrior, the fighter on the border, the raider, the martyr, Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb, may Allāh cover him with His mercy.

(4) The beginning [of the work] on this felicitous tower was in the month of Rabīʿ I, the year 627 (February–March 1230). Its construction was supervised by

(5) the servant needy [for Allah's mercy], Abū Bakr b. Naṣrallāh b. Abū Surāqa(?) al-Hamadhānī al-ʿAzīzī.<sup>21</sup>

## III

Found on the ground, about 20 m south of the wall, approximately equidistant from Towers 2 and 3. Four lines of simple Ayyūbid *naskh*,<sup>22</sup> inscribed into hard limestone, with diacritical points and some vowels; the inscription is broken on both sides. Height: 0.67 m; length: 0.87 m. Unpublished.

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم أمر بعمارة هذا ثغر (المحروس العبد المذنب الخاطي)<sup>24</sup> الفقد (ير الى رحمة الله
٢. الملك العزيز عثمان بن مولانا السلطان (الملك العادل العالم العامل العا .....<sup>25</sup>
٣. (... أبي بكر بن أيوب تغمده) الله برحمته وكان<sup>26</sup> ابتداء (هـ) هذا الثغر المحـ (روس في سنة
٤. سبع وعشرين وستمئة<sup>27</sup> وتولى عمارته العبد) الفقير أبي (sic) بكر بن نصر الله بن أبي سراقه (الهمذاني العزيزي)

<sup>17</sup> "Bāniās": إبناء , which has no meaning; see Nos. III and V,

where this reading is clear.

<sup>18</sup> Van Berchem was unable to read this and was only able to write الفرج العبد (ع), which makes no sense. A comparison, however, with the parallel passage in No. V shows this to be *al-burj al-saʿid*.

<sup>19</sup> For the confusion between *abī* and *abū* in epigraphy, see *MCIA*, I, 43 note 1; 93 note 1.

<sup>20</sup> *ʿImāra* (verbal noun of *ʿamara*) generally means reconstruction, renewal, extension, etc., as opposed to *inshāʿ* (verb *anshaʿa*) and *bināʿ* (verb *banā*) which connote construction from scratch. See *MCIA*, I, 64 note 2, and 89.

<sup>21</sup> I was unable to find more information on this individual in the literary sources. Van Berchem ("Bāniās," 459–61) assumed that he was the artisan in charge of the work. Perhaps, however, he was not a professional builder, but the official who oversaw the work.

<sup>22</sup> This style was called "Coradin" by van Berchem (*MCIA*, I, 123 note 3) because most of the inscriptions of this type date from the period of al-Muʿazzam Sharaf al-Dīn (= Coradin in the Crusader sources) Isā b. al-ʿĀdil (d. 624/1227). It was characterized by round, poorly formed *naskh*, deeply inscribed into the stone. No. IV is similar.

<sup>23</sup> The insertions within the square brackets are based on the texts of Nos. II, IV, V, especially the first-mentioned one. The spaces taken up by the insertion at the beginning of line 1 and the end line 4 have provided us with a rough idea of how much text can be placed in the lacunae on both sides of each line.

<sup>24</sup> Inscription: الخاطي

<sup>25</sup> It seems that the letter *ʿayn* has been inscribed after the definite article. The word to be expected here on the basis of No. II, however, is *al-mujāhid*.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. No. II, *kāma*, without the copulative.

<sup>27</sup> The similarity of style and the identical names of the supervisor of the work led to the insertion of the same year as in Nos. II and V.

- (1) [In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate. Ordered the restoration of this] defended [frontier fortress] the sinning, erring servant needy [for Allāh's mercy,  
 (2) al-Malik al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān b. our lord, the Sultan] al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, the scholar, the doer of good deeds . . .  
 (3) [. . . Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb, may] Allāh [cover him] with his mercy. The beginning [of the work] on this guarded frontier fortress [was in the year  
 (4) 627 (1229–30). Its construction was supervised by the servant] needy [for Allāh's mercy] Abū Bakr b. Naṣrallāh b. Surāqa(?) [al-Hamadhānī al-ʿAzīzī].

## IV

Found on the ground, upside down, adjacent to the northwest corner of Tower 9. Four lines of simple Ayyūbid *naskh*, inscribed into hard limestone with some diacritical points and vowels; broken on all sides. Height: 0.60 m; length: 1.20 m. Unpublished.

١. (بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم) (أمر بعمارة  
 ٢. هذا) (لثغر المحروس العبد المذنب الخ) (طاع الفقير  
 ٣. إلى) (رحمة ربه<sup>28</sup> الملك العزيز عثمان بن مولا نا السلطان  
 ٤. (أ) لاعظم الملك العادل العا (لم<sup>29</sup>.....

- (1)[In the name of] Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate. [Ordered the restoration of  
 (2) this] defended frontier fortress, the sinner, the erring servant [needy  
 (3) for] his Lord's mercy, al-Malik al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān b. our lord, the great [Sultan]  
 (4) al-Malik al-ʿĀdil, the scholar . . .

<sup>28</sup> This is the only inscription in this set to have *rabbihi* instead of *allāh* in this phrase.

<sup>29</sup> Thus in Nos. II and III: cf. No. V.



1 Inscription no. I (photos: Z. Radovan)



2 Inscription no. II



3 Inscription no. III



4 Inscription no. IV

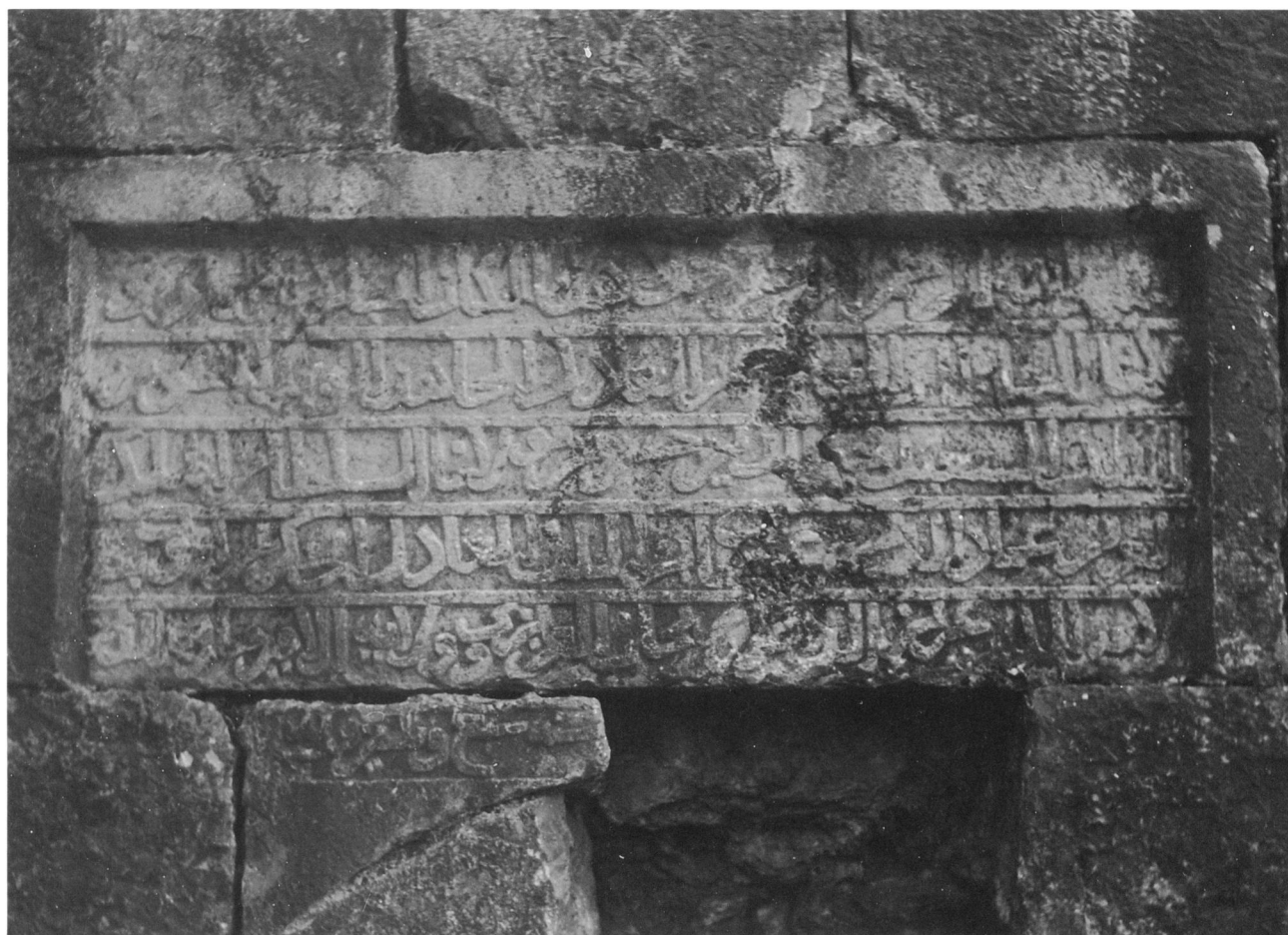




5 Inscription no. V



6 Inscription no. VI



7 Inscription no. VII



## V

Found embedded into the top of the western side of Tower 10.<sup>30</sup> Five lines of Ayyūbid *naskh*, carved into hard limestone with diacritical points and some vowels: the inscription has been broken at the top.<sup>31</sup> Height: 0.76 m; length (max.): 1.40 m. Unpublished.

- ..... ١.  
 ..... ٢.  
 ٣. العابد<sup>32</sup> العامل المجاهد المرابط الغا  
 ٤. زى الشهيد أبى بكر بن أيوب تغمد الله برحمته  
 ٥. ورحمنا إذا صرنا إلى ما صار إليه<sup>33</sup>  
 وكان ابتداء (ء) هذا  
 ٦. البرج السعيد في العشر الاول ربيع الاخر  
 سنة سبع وعشرين وستمائة  
 ٧. وتولا (sic) عمارته العبد الفقير أبى (sic) بكر  
 بن نصر الله بن أبى سراقه الهمذاني العزيزي

(1) ...

(2) ...

(3) the pious, the doer of good deeds, the holy warrior, the fighter on the border, the raider,

(4) the martyr, Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb, may Allāh cover him with his mercy.

(5) May Allāh have mercy on us when it befalls us what has happened to him.<sup>34</sup> The beginning [of the work] on this

(6) felicitous tower was in the first ten days of Rabīʿ I, the year 627 (17–27 February 1230).

(7) Its construction was supervised by the servant needy [for Allāh's mercy], Abū Bakr b. Naṣrallāh b. Abū Surāqa(?) al-Hamadhānī al-ʿAzīzī.

<sup>30</sup>Owing to its high position, this inscription could only be read by studying photographs taken with a telescopic lens.

<sup>31</sup>If the missing text was the same as in No. II, then it would have contained two more lines. This should have made the inscription around 0.60 m higher.

<sup>32</sup>While Nos. II and III have *al-ʿālīm*, *al-ʿābid* is clearly read here. There remains, of course, the possibility that *al-ʿālīm* was the last word in the previous line and *al-ʿābid* was an addition in this inscription.

<sup>33</sup>This phrase is not found in other inscriptions. I would like to thank Dr. S. Sviri (Jerusalem) and Mr. A. S. Morton (London) for their assistance in reading this line.

<sup>34</sup>I.e., his having died.

## VI

Found on the ground, on the southern slope of the hill, above the road leading up to the fortress.<sup>35</sup> Six lines of simple Ayyūbid *naskh*, inscribed into hard limestone, with diacritical points and some vowels. Although broken on all sides, it is clear there is no text above the first extant line, and it is unlikely that there was any below the last line (assuming that the text here is more or less identical to nos. II–V). While the inscription has been defaced in the upper right corner, it is obvious that the inscription did not extend on the right past present stone, because the beginning of the *basmala* fits into the chipped portion. Height (max.): 0.90 m; length (max.): 0.80 m. Unpublished.

<sup>35</sup>The inscription was uncovered when a tractor working in the area dragged it up.

١. بسم الله (ال)رحمن الرحيم ....
٢. .... الخا(ط)ي (sic) الفقير الى ر(حمة) ...
٣. الملك العادل العا(لم) ال(عامل) ...
٤. ايوب<sup>36</sup> تغمد الله ب(رحمته) ...
٥. وعشرين<sup>38</sup> ....
٦. نصر (؟)<sup>39</sup> و (؟) ....

The extremely fragmentary nature of this inscription and its repetition of the text found in the previous four inscriptions permits us to omit its translation.

## VII

Found, apparently in situ, on a bit of wall which makes up part of the eastern side of a structure over a cistern. Five lines of Ayyūbid *naskh*,<sup>40</sup> carved in relief into hard limestone, with some diacritical points but no vowels; the bottom line, shorter than

the rest, has partly disappeared (it existed in van Berchem's time). Height: 0.67 m; length: 1.50 m. Published: "Bāniās," 462; *RCEA*, XI, 113 (no. 4168).

١. بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم جدد هذا المكان المبارك  
في أيام مو
٢. لانا السلطان العالم العادل المجاهد المؤيد المنصور
٣. الملك السعيد فخر الدين حسن بن مولانا السلطان الملك
٤. العزيز عماد الدين عثمان بن الملك العادل أبي بكر  
بن أيوب بنظر
٥. الامير الكبير عزيز الدولة ربحان<sup>41</sup> العزيزي وولاية الامير مبارز<sup>42</sup> الدين
٦. (خطلح<sup>43</sup> العزيزي في شهور) سنة سبع وثلثين وستمائة

<sup>36</sup>This word falls under the space where *bismillāh* on line 1 would have been found. Thus, it seems that this is the beginning of the line, although possibly the word *ibn* appeared before it.

<sup>37</sup>See previous note.

<sup>38</sup>Since the wording of this fragment is identical to the wording of the parallel parts of Nos. II and V, it seems likely that the date here is also A.H. 627. Possibly the word *sab* appeared at the beginning of this line.

<sup>39</sup>According to my calculation, this word should be eight words from the last word on the previous line (*'ishrīm*). In Nos. II and V, this is *naṣr*. The letters present here can be read as

such, although not unequivocally. But the following letter, which seems to be a *wāw*, does not correspond with the expected word, *allāh*. Thus I have queried my reading.

<sup>40</sup>Cf. No. I, whose letters are more slender and delicate.

<sup>41</sup>Cf. "Bāniās": ركاف ; *ibid.*, 463: "peut-être ركان."

<sup>42</sup>Cf. "Bāniās": مارر

<sup>43</sup>This is based on van Berchem's reading, as the first part of this line has since disappeared; but cf. "Banias":(؟) حطلح ; see note 45 below.

- (1) In the name of Allāh, the Merciful, the Compassionate. This blessed place was rebuilt in the days of our lord,  
 (2) the Sultan, the scholar, the just, the holy warrior, the assisted [by Allāh], the victorious,  
 (3) al-Malik al-Saʿīd Fakhr al-Dīn Ḥasan b. our lord, al-Sultan al-Malik  
 (4) al-ʿAzīz ʿImād al-Dīn ʿUthmān b. al-Malik al-ʿĀdil Abū Bakr b. Ayyūb.<sup>44</sup> [This work was] under the supervision of  
 (5) the great amīr, ʿAzīz al-Dawla Rayḥān al-ʿAzīzī,<sup>45</sup> and under the command (or during the governorship [of the castle]) of the amīr Mubārīz al-Dīn  
 (6) Khutlukh al-ʿAzīzī<sup>46</sup> in the months of the year 637 (1239–40).

<sup>44</sup>For the checkered career of this prince, who was executed in 658/1260 for collaboration with the Mongols, see R. S. Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols* (Albany, 1977), index, s.v. al-Saʿīd Ḥasan b. al-ʿAzīz.

<sup>45</sup>This was a eunuch (*tawāshī*) who in 629/1231–2 had served al-Malik al-Nāṣir Dāwūd, then ruler of Karak; Ibn Wāṣil, *Muḥarrir al-kurūb*, V, ed. Ḥ. M. Rabīʿ and S. ʿA.-F. ʿĀshūr (Cairo, 1977), 15, 19.

<sup>46</sup>I was unable to identify this individual, but his Turkish name, a variant of Qutlū or Quṭluḡ, shows him to have been most probably a mamlūk: the *nisba* al-ʿAzīzī indicates that he was in all likelihood the mamlūk of al-ʿAzīz ʿUthmān b. Abū Bakr, the constructor of al-Ṣubayba and father of the builder of this cistern.

#### ADDITIONAL NOTE

In addition to the four new Ayyūbid inscriptions recently discovered and published above, R. Ellenblum has found fragments of three other inscriptions, evidently from the early Mamlūk period and probably dating from Baybars' major reconstruction works. We list them briefly below, along with the one already published by M. van Berchem:

VIII. Found lying about 10 m east of Tower 10, in three fragments. Published: "Bāniās" 466; *RCEA*, XII, 225–26 (no. 4737).

IX. Found on Tower 15, near its western corner. Contains the beginning of three lines, with floral decoration.

X. Found lying near the southeast corner of Tower 9, mostly under ground; now partially uncovered.

XI. Found adjacent to Tower 16, to its northeast, in two parts.

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